



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

### Fish and Wildlife Service

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#### ENDANGERED SPECIES CONSULTATIONS MADE 'EASIER, FASTER' UNDER FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PROPOSED RULE

Consultation procedures under the Endangered Species Act will become easier, faster, more efficient, and "user-friendly" with a new regulation proposed today by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service.

The proposal was developed with the Bureau of Land Management and the USDA Forest Service and will apply to those agencies' activities. "This is one more in a series of efforts by the Administration to take advantage of the flexibility of the Endangered Species Act," said Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt.

Babbitt said the proposed regulation recognizes a need "to streamline land management planning decisions."

"These procedures will help everyone. The objective is to identify standards and guidelines that will result in a more efficient process. Better coordination among agencies of the Federal Government will save tax dollars as well," said Secretary of Commerce Ronald H. Brown.

"These new rules give the agencies more discretion in consultation activities," said Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman. "They will keep low-risk ongoing activities from being shut down and will improve consultation efficiency. They will help us avoid surprises--and train wrecks."

Known formally as "counterpart Section 7 consultation regulations," the proposal encourages early discussion among the land management agencies and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service by requiring the development of a consultation agreement when a species is proposed for listing, when critical habitat is proposed, when the Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management amends or revises a plan, or at the request of any of the agencies. Such compacts would require mutual agreement on:

- o whether consultation on a land management plan is appropriate and if so, how the consultation should proceed,

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- o whether parameters can be identified to meet survival and recovery needs, and
- o how and when site-specific consultation will be conducted.

The proposed regulations would also provide for a rapid assessment of ongoing activities and modification or suspension of those actions that pose an "imminent threat" to listed species. Under the new regulation, some ongoing activities may continue while consultation proceeds.

The final regulations published in the Federal Register are subject to a 60-day public comment period. Individuals wishing to submit written comments should address them to: Chief, Division of Endangered Species, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1849 C Street NW., Washington, DC 20240. Final rules will be drafted based on public comments and the experience of agencies in some test applications.